



# STARTING A MENTORING PROGRAM

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I came to the Free Methodist Church in 2009 after twenty-seven years of working in youth ministry and leadership development, both in para-church organizations and churches. I started coaching many of our Free Methodist pastors in Southern California, and fell in love with the Free Methodist movement: the history rooted in social justice, the connectivity among our churches, and the diversity of ethnicity and leadership. However, I noticed very few faces under the age of 40. So I went to our superintendents and said, "I'm concerned that within one generation's time, we will shrivel up if we do not intentionally develop more young leaders." From there, we started the Center for Transformational Leadership (CTL), shaped by a vision received by Pastor Denny Wayman at the 2011 General Conference. Our first step was to launch an **intern program**, focusing on college students and young adults. We matched them with leaders in our churches who could mentor them. Since 2011, we have had 38 interns go through our program, and have 10 more this summer. Much more could be said about the process, but here are some fundamental steps to get you started:

- **DEFINE:** We needed to start by defining what we meant by mentoring, and Keith does a fantastic job at the beginning of this article of describing what we expected out of the relationship. A common mistake within industry and the non-profit sector is to view interns as "cheap labor" that help to get a company or church an increased numbers of workers at minimal cost. Rather, interns actually require deep investment by leadership in the short-term, which ultimately reaps long-term results as the interns are formed in their leadership.
- **DISCERN:** time, wisdom and prayer need to be devoted to discerning both who are to be the mentors and who is to receive the mentoring. Some people call these people "mentees," but I find that word to be awkward! Nevertheless, a systematic process needs to be in place that cultivates both seasoned leaders and young people with potential. Much of my work centers around this recruiting and development process.
- **DEVELOP:** once expectations for mentoring are defined, and the mentors and those being mentored are selected, a plan for leadership development must be created. In 2011, I created a list of **best practices**, also known as **core competencies**, that I believe each leader needs to learn and develop in order to succeed long-term in ministry. These are not things I learned in seminary as much as through a life of ministry. I then mapped out a ten-week program of training, reflection and mentoring for a summer interns program. We meet once a week online via Go-To Meeting for training, discussion and reflection. Interns receive reading and writing assignments weekly, and are often asked to experiment in various ways. We allow for extended time to process all of these things and come up with further steps as follow up.

- **DEBRIEF and DEPLOY:** once the interns and their mentors have completed the summer, we take some time to reflect on the process and evaluate the potential for each intern. More often than not, all parties involved agree that the intern should continue in their leadership development process, and we help to find them a context for further ministry and growth as a leader.
- **DECIDE:** Ultimately there comes a time of decision related to calling and purpose, which involves many questions. Should the intern enter the Free Methodist ordination process? Should they continue with their mentor, or find another one for further training and growth? Should they move into church planting, bi-vocational ministry, graduate school or something else? We are grateful that 75% of our interns have continued with us in the Free Methodist Church, and over one-third of them have entered the ordination track.

In Dallas Willard's last book before his recent passing (co-authored with Dr. Gary Black, Jr), titled *The Divine Conspiracy Continued*, he declared the importance of such leadership development in no uncertain terms:

*The role of the local church is to manifest goodwill in abundance by training individuals to be ambassadors of good and light in every area, every corner, and every aspect of our shadowy world... The purpose of the church is to make disciples, so that pastors should be devoted to that primary task above all others.*  
(pp. 295-296)

May we work together, both lay and clergy leaders, to forge leaders of character, faith and wisdom, to influence the world for Christ.